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Written Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 939, An Act Concerning a Registry of Criminal Offenders Whose Victims Are Elderly

Senator Ayala, Representative Serra and distinguished members of the Aging Committee, please accept this written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 939, An Act Concerning a Registry of Criminal Offenders Whose Victims Are Elderly.

I'm David McGuire, staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut. We support the goal of protecting the elderly but we are very concerned about the practical and legal problems that the proposed registry would create.

What we've learned from the sex offender registries that already exist in Connecticut and many other states is that they can constitute an additional extrajudicial form of punishment and that they can lead to retaliation against former offenders who are trying to rehabilitate themselves. Additionally, a person convicted of a minor offense involving a senior, perhaps not even requiring jail time, will still have to register for 10 years with their name, birth date and last known address. Criminal convictions are public records that can easily be consulted for a background check when truly necessary. But the casual ease of consulting a public registry can bring unnecessary public exposure and retribution against those who have already paid their debt to society and are trying to rebuild their lives. Research clearly shows that a job, a stable home and family support are the factors that prevent recidivism. And the reintegration of former offenders into productive roles in society is good for everyone.

Worse, such a database would engender complacency and a false sense of security. Someone listed on the registry for a single conviction on a non-violent offense against an elderly person might pose no real threat to other seniors. And the presumption that someone who is not listed on the registry is therefore "safe" could be a dangerous mistake. Instead of teaching senior citizens and their caregivers to rely on a registry of past offenders, it would be far better to teach them to take sensible precautions to protect themselves from crime.

Even worse is the danger that a poorly maintained and inaccurate database would cause confusion, potentially implicating completely innocent people with names similar to those of former offenders. This would further undermine the commendable goal of protecting the elderly population.

I respectfully ask the committee to reject Senate Bill 939 and to redirect the resources toward a more effective program of educating and supporting the elderly in protecting themselves from victimization.